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# What is the Minnesota social welfare scandal that has drawn Trump's ire?

By Reuters

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U.S. President Donald Trump speaks in the Oval Office as he signs an executive order, at the White House in Washington, D.C., U.S., December 18, 2025. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

Jan 14 (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly invoked a scandal around the theft of federal funds intended for social-welfare programs in Minnesota as a rationale for sending thousands of immigration enforcement agents into the Midwest state.

Here is how Trump, a Republican, has sought to connect a scandal that began during the COVID-19 pandemic to his recent efforts to vilify the state's large communities of Somali Americans and Somali immigrants:

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#### WHEN DID THE SCANDAL BEGIN?

In September 2022 under the administration of Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, then U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland [announced the indictment](#) of 47 people accused of defrauding \$250 million from a state-run, federally funded child nutrition program during the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in 2020.

Some of the defendants worked for Feeding Our Future, a nonprofit. Others were their associates who ran restaurants or similar companies that claimed to have served hundreds of thousands of free meals to children when they had not.

#### HOW IS THIS CONNECTED TO SOMALI AMERICANS AND SOMALI IMMIGRANTS?

The founder and executive director of Feeding Our Future was Aimee Bock, a white American woman, who was accused of overseeing the fraud scheme. Most of her employees, associates and co-defendants were Somali Americans, according to local news reports.

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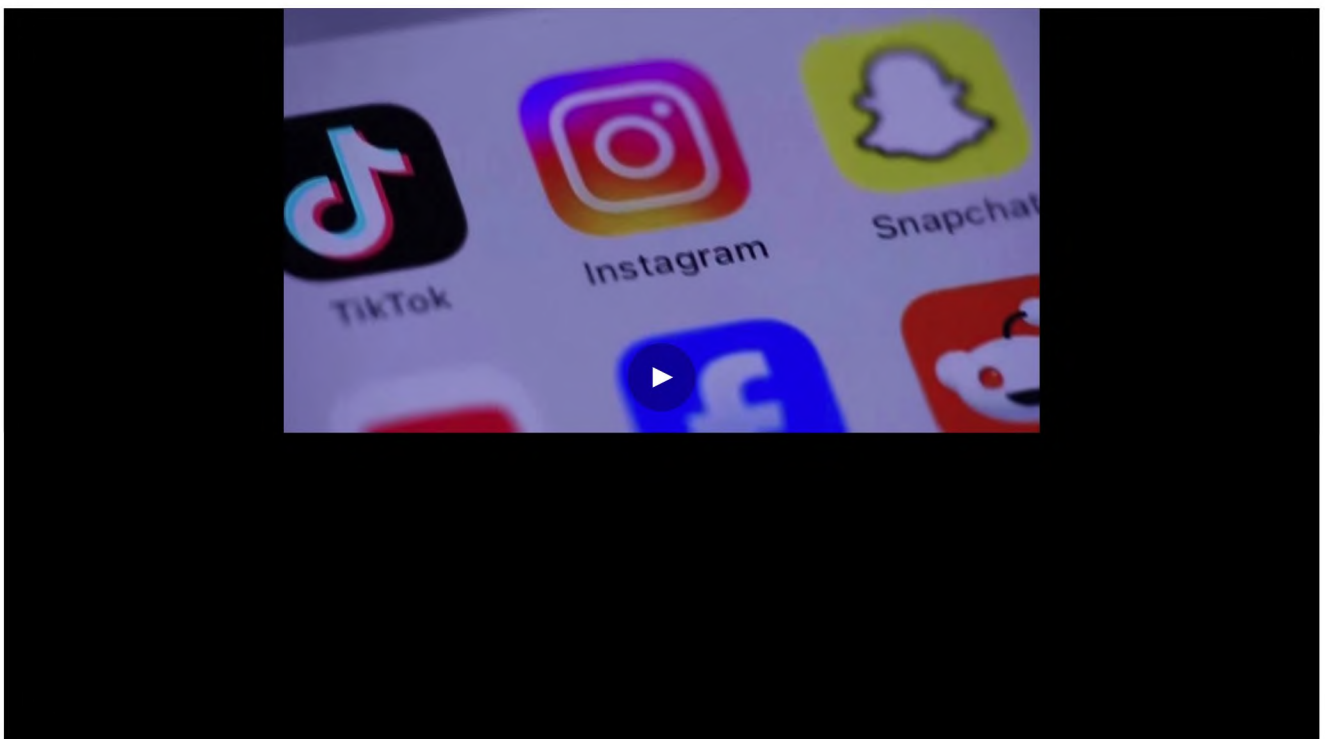
Minnesota has the largest number of people of Somali origin of any U.S. state, an estimated 76,000 in 2024, according to U.S. Census estimates. About half are U.S. citizens by birth or by naturalization, but thousands of Somalis have fled to the state in the last few years to escape Somalia's civil war.

Trump accused Somalis collectively of "ripping off" Minnesota, said they "contribute nothing" and referred to them as "garbage."

"I don't want them in our country, I'll be honest with you, somebody will say, 'Oh, that's not politically correct,' I don't care," Trump told reporters at the White House in December.

#### SINCE THE 2022 INDICTMENTS

The prosecutions were pursued throughout Biden's presidency and have continued into Trump's second term, resulting in more indictments and charges of defrauding other federal funds, including some intended to benefit children with autism.



A jury [found Bock guilty](#) last March on all counts. Last September, the Justice Department said at least 56 defendants had pleaded guilty, avoiding trials.

#### HOW HAS MINNESOTA RESPONDED?

Minnesota's government began investigating Feeding Our Future in 2020. The state's Department of Education relayed its concerns about fraud to the FBI, leading to the federal indictments.

The state has also investigated Feeding Our Future for fraud around state funding and for violating Minnesota's charity laws, and recently set up a new state-wide fraud-fighting unit.

Governor Tim Walz, a Democrat, and state lawmakers have announced new measures to detect and prevent the theft of both state and federal funds.

Walz expressed regret about how the state has handled the scandal, saying he "should have been keeping Minnesotans more up to speed on what was happening," and earlier this month announced he was abandoning his bid for a third term as governor, citing his need to keep his attention on fighting fraud.

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#### HOW HAS THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION RESPONDED?

Several agencies overseen by Trump have announced greater scrutiny of Minnesota or threatened to end federal funding. One of the agencies, the Health and Human Services Department, said its actions were spurred by a viral video in December by a right-wing online influencer, Nick Shirley, which made some unsubstantiated or incorrect claims about his visits to federally funded childcare centers.

In January, Trump sent more than 2,000 of immigration agents into the streets of Minneapolis to arrest and deport migrants, and said he is ending a special protected status, which includes work permits, for Somali asylum seekers in the U.S., affecting about 1,100 people across the country. The White House says immigration agents also are identifying potential fraud cases.

Compiled by Jonathan Allen; editing by Donna Bryson and Nia Williams

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